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ABSTRACT

A special transitional course (College Success) developed for college freshmen at the State University of New York College at Cortland is described in this report. Designed to meet standard problems of transition from high school to college and deal with detected deficits in learning and studying skills, it offers small group experience on issues related to effective learning, orientation, advisement, and personal development. Typical psychological orientations that college personnel use in understanding student behaviors are discussed. Six psychological orientations applied to first-year students are psychoanalytic, biological, cognitivist, cognitive developmental, humanistic-existentialist, and behaviorist views. The elements of College Success based on learning theory for first-year students are noted (academic skill development, notes, vocabulary, learning and memory, test taking, brainstorming, recordkeeping, problem solving and decision making, academic social behaviors, advisement, orientation, and conduct of the course). The development of College Success with attention to innovation theory is discussed. Results show the course is successful according to grade point average, academic dismissal, and student and instructor feedback. Such freshman seminar courses can change the focus of incoming students by making them better prepared. (SM)

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COLLEGE SUCCESS: A TRANSITIONAL COURSE FOR FRESHMEN

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

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ABSTRACT

College Success: A Transitional Course for Freshmen
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To meet standard problems of transition from high school to college and, more specifically, to deal with detected deficits in learning and studying skills, the College developed a course for freshmen. Begun in 1983, the course provides small group experience on issues related to effective learning, orientation, advisement, and personal development. Freshmen enroll voluntarily. From 50 to 75 percent of the freshman class have elected to take the course, which meets twice weekly for the first half of the semester and then once a week for the remainder, providing 21 hours of class time for one elective credit toward graduation.

Areas covered include effective reading of texts, abstracting critical information, organizing material, note taking, development of memory strategies, test taking, problem solving and decision making, active participation in learning, time management, and learning major policies and procedures of the college that a freshman should know.

When first semester grades of students in the course are compared to those of matched students not enrolled, statistical differences in favor of College Success students are noted. Academic dismissal rates are 50 to 60-plus percent lower. Students in the high and low bands of entry characteristics (e.g., SAT Verbal and high school average) appear to benefit most from the course. Additionally, students are exceptionally positive about what they have learned and experienced in the course, and instructors also rate it highly.

Instructors represent the spectrum of personnel on the campus, including the President, Registrar, Deans and Associate Deans, Department Chairs, Student Affairs personnel, and even Business Office staff. Students use an in-house generated manual, and instructors are provided very detailed day-by-day lesson plans. The course, therefore, has a tight and uniform structure across sections. Instructors have taught the course voluntarily above load; although in 1988 a modest stipend was awarded those who taught.

The goal is to increasingly incorporate into traditional courses that which is emphasized in College Success, especially regarding learning and studying skills.

INTRODUCTION

This report discusses typical psychological orientations that college personnel use in understanding student behaviors, especially in the academic domain. It is suggested that these orientations are not as productive as infrequently--so far--adopted behavioral view. The major difference is that the behavioral view focuses on developing behavior patterns, while the more typical views tend to focus on internal cognitive and emotional states.

Following the brief psychological orientation review is information on what is covered in the course and how it is covered. The third section discusses how the course was formulated, and the last section deals with results.

COLLEGE SUCCESS: A TRANSITIONAL COURSE FOR FRESHMEN

This paper is divided into four parts. Part I outlines six psychological orientations applied to first year students. Part II describes the elements of a course based on learning theory for first year students--College Success--at State University of New York College at Cortland. Part III describes the development of College Success with attention to innovation theory. Part IV relates to results.

Part I: Psychological Orientations Applied to First Year Students

First year college student behaviors might be examined through six psychological orientations currently conceptualized in the United States. The orientations are the: (1) psychoanalytic, (2) biological, (3) cognitivist, (4) developmental cognitivist, (5) humanistic-existential, and (6) behaviorist. Each view holds certain assumptions about behavior which lead to predictable interactions with, interpretations of, and prescriptions for students' behaviors. The basic elements of each orientation are presented as they apply to work with first year college students.

Psychoanalytic View

The core assumption of the psychoanalytic view, that affects college personnel's view of student behaviors, is that emotional processes are the source of behavior. Behavior is seen as symbolic or symptomatic of those processes. What is shown on the surface, through what one does, reflects something underneath. From this point of view, in order to understand students, one is led to infer underlying and therefore hidden qualities or problems. For example, if students are doing well in college, the tendency in the U.S. is to speak of them as having some inner resources that they tap, resources such as drive, motivation, tenacity, and intelligence. These students are highly regarded by faculty.

Students doing poorly are assumed, through the psychoanalytic view, to either be missing something they should have or having some sort of disease, such as laziness. These students are looked upon with disdain. It would be assumed that there is little that can be done for these students by faculty or other college personnel, for the underlying source of the problem is not amenable to alteration in the academic arena.

In as much as the cause of behavior, according to the psychoanalytic view, is assumed to stem from within the person, what professors say and do to students is considered irrelevant. They therefore do not influence students. Some students come psychologically equipped to meet faculty expectations, while

others do not. The key to having a good first year class is to select students who have the "right" qualities and are void of the deficits. When errors in the selection process are made, and the student is not successful, the student should leave to be "cured" elsewhere.

Biological View

For faculty and other college personnel, holding this view, what students do in college is primarily dependent on their biological inheritance. The most important inherited component is intelligence. Some students are naturally bright, while others are not. Since, from the biological perspective, intelligence is inherited, faculty cannot influence this key element.

Both the biological and psychoanalytic viewpoints hold that a student's abilities cannot be improved. Students with high scores on standardized tests of academic promise are assumed to be better students, and those are the ones who should be accepted. they are intelligent. In the U.S. there are two such tests that most college-bound students take. One is given through the Educational Testing Service (ETS)--the Scholastic Aptitude Test or commonly known as the SAT. The other is administered by the American College Testing Program, and it is known as the ACT. Both primarily tap verbal and quantitative skills. A student would usually take only one of these tests, which one depending in what area of the U.S. he or she lived.

Cognitivist View

The assumptions of the cognitivist view are that knowledge and thinking lead to behaviors in students. If students are doing well, it is assumed they have reasoned that it is in their best interests and that it is rational to do so. Students who do not do well need explanations. They have to be told why they should do certain things. When they are thus instructed, it is expected that they will alter their patterns accordingly. From this view, one talks to students in difficulty and presents reasons why they should change their behaviors. The goal of the cognitivist is reached when the student understands the rationale behind the suggestions. If this goal is reached, the student will improve. If students do not improve, it is because they did not understand what they were told. Another attempt to explain will be made: "Maybe this time I can get through to you."

It can be argued that the cognitivist view is popular in U.S. higher education. We lecture to students, speak to them in private, and give them information--all with the expectation it will affect their behavior.

Cognitive Developmental View

The key feature of this view is that mental facility is a function of development as opposed to environmental intervention. Piaget would be the primary proponent. Most faculty implicitly assume (meaning they might not actually know Piaget) that students are at the formal operations level of cognitive development. This would mean that students could think hypotheses and anticipate methods of testing them without actually going through the steps.

It has been estimated that as much as 50 percent of entering college students in the U.S. are not at the formal operations stage. There appears there is a gap between expectation and reality in many teacher/student relationships. If this is the case, then the assumption would be that courses requiring high levels of abstract thinking, such a logic, would be out of reach of first year students. The lack of formal operations would also show up in students' writing, as in their difficulty in developing a theme logically and in classifying thoughts.

An increasingly popular cognitive developmental orientation in the U.S. is that offered by William Perry, who suggests a developmental scheme of thinking for college students. He proposes that students often enter college with dualistic thinking, while professors expect more relativistic thinking. There is some debate as to whether this is really a hierarchical and developmental scheme in the traditional sense. If one is going to use Perry's scheme, it would be important to identify progress through the levels as something natural or, on the other hand, amenable to environmental intervention. If the former, then instructors would not expect to be influential in helping students to higher Perry levels. If students could change levels through instructor input, then instructors would provide experiences, probably through cognitive exercises, to bring students to yet unexhibited levels.

Humanistic-Existentialist View

While professionals and scholars might balk at the way the humanistic-existentialist view has been interpreted in the U.S. colleges and universities, it is those interpretations that are relevant to this presentation.

The humanistic and existentialist psychological orientations emphasize the singular uniqueness of each person. Therefore, the learning experiences for each student are different. Greater latitudes of freedom in curriculum choices and methods of learning would be considered. The whole person is also considered in this view. That is, the individual's social, psychological, physical, philosophical parameters are considered. In evaluating the success of first year programs, group

evaluation would not be seen as valuable as individual data, and that evaluation might be qualitative rather than quantitative.

The humanistic-existentialist view would include more of the student's contribution to his or her learning. The student would be seen as an active participant in planning a program and pursuing it. Personal autonomy would be stressed. All students would be treated as distinct individuals. The college personnel would be seen as facilitators of development, not teachers in the usual sense. The individual's development is much more in the individual's control. For instance, professors holding this view would not require attendance in classes. the college personnel would not see it as appropriate to try to intervene too much in the student's growth, for only the student can decide what is best for him or her.

Behaviorist View

The most fundamental assumption held by behaviorists is that the environment influences behavior. Another important assumption is that behavior can influence emotions. This is in direct contrast to the psychoanalytic view. Similarly, those favoring this orientation would posit that behavior can influence thinking, which would be in contrast to the cognitivist view.

At the college level, the behaviorists would see intelligence as a set of discrete skills that can be taught, thereby opposing the biological position. An individual student will develop as a result of engaging in carefully designed tasks and receiving positive feedback for progress. Finally, the behaviorists would place least emphasis on internal states of the individual, emphasizing instead external behaviors and events that affect them. The behaviorist would break cognitive tasks and behaviors into sub-elements and would work to build them toward what is called target outcomes.

So What?

It would be incorrect to suggest that all college personnel adopt just one of these views as they formulate their attitudes and accompanying behaviors toward students. However, many faculty appear to act as though they hold either the psychoanalytic, biological, or cognitive views. For instance, Student Affairs personnel seem to primarily hold the humanistic-existential or developmental view. The behavioral view is least popular in U.S. higher education at this time.

Empirical evaluation can be used to support or to reject some of the tenets of each position, but the matter is far from simple. There are significant interactions between elements from each stance that cause conflict. If one is primarily a behaviorist, one cannot discount biological considerations when

analyzing cognitive outcomes. A biological could not legitimately support the view that the environment does not affect cognitive outcomes.

The issue is not which view is correct, but which one offers most promise in working with first year students. To be able to adopt just one approach, one would have to demonstrate its utility by evaluating it through dependent measures. Which dependent measures one uses, though, is influenced by one's orientation. Hence a behaviorist might look at observable outcomes, all but neglecting a student's self-perceptions of the value of what the outcomes mean.

The humanist, on the other hand, is more likely to emphasize self-report as a dependent measure. The cognitivist would focus on examples of cognitive development but not have much interest in behavioral correlates. Basic assumptions about the nature of students are made on the basis of the viewpoint the thinker holds. Those assumptions must be clarified when problems are analyzed and goal statements are made. In other words, they should be stated clearly. When comparing first year programs it would be essential to first identify underlying assumptions. Depending on one's orientation, different outcomes would be expected from a successful first year program. For instance, faculty who hold a biological view might not see the utility in designing certain programs for first year students. There would be no point in it, they would assert. There is nothing, or very little, that could be done.

Part II: The First-Year-Student Course--College Success

In this section the elements of the first-year-student course--College Success--are described. The course has three main thrusts: (1) academic skill development, (2) advisement function, and (3) orientation to the College. These three areas are discussed in the above order.

At State University of New York College at Cortland, the designers of the course for first year students--College Success-primarily adopted a learning theory orientation, that emphasized behaviorism but also included cognitive learning theory. In doing so, other positions were not discounted outright but were not seen as offering as promising outcomes that were considered important by the designers. Initially, the dependent measures considered were grades at the end of the first semester and whether or not the students continued on for the second semester.

In adopting the behavioral view, there was a conscious recognition of working against existing alternative views at our institution, which we saw as the psychoanalytic, biological, and cognitive. We came to this conclusion based on what we heard

from faculty. There were complaints from a range of faculty that many of our incoming students were unmotivated and essentially dumb. The most recommended solution that we heard to this condition was that there be better screening of incoming students and greater efforts expended to attract students with higher SAT scores. Even if such a proposal were valid in its underlying assumption (i.e., students with high SAT's are better students), it did not appear realistic because the available pool of high SAT students had diminished significantly in New York State.

More important in our considerations, though, was our interest in demonstrating that academic skills could be taught. We removed ourselves from the argument that "weak" students ought not be in our college in the first place. We worked from the reality that many of our students were not as prepared as many college personnel would like. Somewhat ironically, the students who benefited from one term of the course were those with the strongest high school averages.

Our students are rather open about their lack of academic preparation from high school. Many report that they were able to achieve respectable or at least adequate grades by doing very little. In one exercise we ask them to write a letter to their high school in which they reflect on how prepared they were for college level work. A frequent complaint they paint was that they had been spoonfed or babied. In a survey of all first year students at our college, the majority reported that their last year in high school was less rigorous than their previous three years. Our view, then, was that they had not developed behaviors that are necessary for academic success in college. Not available to us at the time College Success was designed are the current reports of the U.S. educational process--such as: A Nation at Risk, Horace's Compromise--the Dilemma of the American High School, and A Place Called School--that validate our students' perceptions of their education prior to college. Our first task was to go to the research literature to see what findings we could incorporate in our proposed course. The following findings were used in designing College Success.

Academic Skill Development

Reading

Minimal Underlining:

One problem many of our students had reported prior to College Success, and have since more clearly reported, is that of selecting the essential from non-essential information from textbook readings.

A study conducted at the University of Nebraska indicated success with a program of minimal underlining of prose. In that

study, subjects were asked to underline the least number of words that were essential to communicate the main idea. After each passage for which this was attempted, feedback was given based on judges' opinions of what should have been the least number of words. The students then progressed to the next passage, and the feedback was repeated. The results indicated that students could improve their skills in culling essential information through practice. Another finding was that there was an improvement in their scores on a standardized reading test.

In our course, students are given practice exercises for minimal underlining, and are given practice assignments for their texts. Many of our students in the past had attempted an approach similar to this but were much too general with it. They had used yellow felt-tip markers--known as highlighters--to signify important information. However, they most often were not discrete. Consequently, there were large chunks of yellow on the pages of their textbooks, with little discrimination shown.

Index Cards:

After underlining critical material, students are instructed to transcribe what they underlined onto index cards (three inches by five inches). When appropriate, they are to summarize the material they transfer to the cards. This encourages active engagement with the material. To summarize, one has to detect the essentials and cannot merely write information word for word. On each card, they write cue words on one side for details they are to learn. On the opposite side, they write the needed information.

When all the needed information is transferred to the cards, students have a handy, reduced version of the text. They can carry them in their pockets or book sacks during the day and refer to them in spare moments, thereby making use of what normally would be dead time. The students are encouraged to use the cards for self-quizzing. They look at the cue words, attempt retrieving the information on the reverse side, and then check their accuracy. If they have correctly retrieved the details, that card is put aside. They thus form two stacks of cards: "known" and "to be learned." By doing this, the students have feedback about their learning; the "known" pile gets thicker, and the "to be learned" pile thinner. We assume this provides reinforcement for learning.

Another outcomes of forming the two stacks is the discrimination afforded about what is actually learned. It has been observed that students tend to overestimate their knowledge of material unfamiliar to them and to underestimate their knowledge of material that is familiar. Hence, when studying by reading text, they too often concentrate on what they already have learned and tend not to spend needed time on what they do

not yet know. Of all that is covered in College Success, students report the use of index cards is the most valuable.

Chapter Mapping:

We also teach the students how to map a chapter, using major headings, subheadings and details. They are instructed to do this two ways. One is to use the index card. Since most U.S. college level textbooks have about 15 chapters, and since each chapter has about seven major headings, students can have the major areas for an entire text on roughly one hundred cards. With this technique we are operating on the finding, well established in the literature, that information in memory is best learned, stored, and retrieved when it is categorized. The headings provide the category headings under which the specifics are to be organized.

The other chapter mapping approach is to place on one sheet of 8-1/2 by 11 inch paper the headings and subheadings of a chapter. Besides organizational theory in learning guiding us here, we are also tapping literature that suggests a graphic representation of information which enhances learning.

Writing in Textbooks:

We encourage our students to write in their books. They are told to write ideas that occur to them as they read, to draw lines connecting related bits of information, and to outline major points more clearly if necessary. Our intention is to cause an interactive process in reading. Our impression is that students too often read passively, sometimes doing little more than letting their eyes pass over the print. Most of our students used school-owned books in high school and were admonished not to write in them. What we are asking them to do, then, is contrary to their prior educational experiences.

Notes

Students informed us that note taking in high school almost exclusively consisted of transcribing what their teachers had put on the board or on an overhead transparency. They have had little or no practice in taking notes directly from what is orally presented. Three problems of note taking emerge for first year students. One is the speed at which they now have to take down information. Another is knowing what to take down. The third is selecting an effective format for writing notes.

College Success students are presented with a variety of formats to select from, as we have not been able to find evidence for the value of one style over another. Intuitively, we hold that notation that some type of main-point/sub-point organization is more effective than not having such a pattern.

We have approached the problem of speed in taking notes in two ways. One is to present the students with some suggestions for making abbreviations. Too often we have found that our students write every word in its full form. The second approach is to teach our students how to effectively ask an instructor to either repeat something that was said or to slow down. We use a role-playing strategy here, with the College Success instructor purposely going so fast during a lecture as to make it impossible for students to keep up. This sets the stage for giving instructions on how to address a professor under these circumstances. Students report mixed success with this in their traditional courses, with some of their instructors accommodating them and others becoming annoyed. We try to have our students act on the belief that they have a right to ask their professors to repeat or to clarify, providing the student is being attentive and is using some type of short-hand for notes. Of all that is dealt with in our course, the note taking section probably needs most work, along with vocabulary building and time management.

Vocabulary

A clear complaint of faculty at our college is that students reveal an impoverished vocabulary for college-level work. We have numerous examples of words that professors assume their students understand but which the students indicate they do not. We have approached vocabulary cautiously and not very completely, for we have serious reservations about being effective in this area. Initially, we presented meanings for frequently used word roots and prefixes and suffixes. The rationale seemed valid. We believed that this traditional approach would provide a resource for students defining new words. The student feedback suggested this approach was not effective; but we have no way of knowing if it, in fact, does have utility.

We had our own doubts about the approach we attempted, for we had heard from people we respect as knowledgeable about vocabulary that it is not effectively taught out of context. This information led us to ask students to make lists of words they hear in lecture or read in their texts but do not understand and to then look up their meanings in a dictionary. We have no evidence of this working or not. Vocabulary remains an area for which we yet have to develop strategies.

Learning and Memory

For first year college students, memory is a fundamental cognitive area that is needed in many courses in which they enroll. Basic to much education is the need to acquire, store, process, and to retrieve information. It has been our observation that students have been led to believe that some people have good memories, while others have poor ones and that

there is little that one can do to improve one's memory. It has been only relatively recently that cognitive psychologists have seen learning and memory as skills that can be developed. For this part of the course, we present students with strategies for working with different types of learning tasks.

Paired-Associate Learning:

A portion of student learning involves pairing items together so that when one item is given, the other is to be generated--paired associate learning. Examples include learning foreign language equivalents to English words, learning dates with events, and learning symbols (as in chemistry) and what they stand for. Most of our students in College Success indicate that in high school they learned such pairs by repeating them over and over again. While such an approach will work eventually, it has been shown that quicker and more effective learning of pairs occurs when they are linked meaningfully by the student with some idiosyncratic connector. Students are encouraged to capitalize on this finding with course material for which it is appropriate.

Mnemonics:

Some college level learning, especially in first-year courses, requires that lists of items be learned. Many students have to learn classification schemes in biology and psychology, two courses highly enrolled by first year students. For the novice learning such schemes, mere rehearsal is not an effective approach. Again, if meaning can be created out of that which has no inherent meaning, the result is improvement in learning. For appropriate material, we have students practice creating mnemonic devices--words or sayings that capture the initial letters of each item in a group.

Imagery:

Developing mental images of material has been a recommended memory technique stemming back to the high point in Greek civilization. Considerable research supports its value. Therefore, we advise our students to draw diagrams and pictures (forgetting artistic considerations) of information that lends itself to graphic representation.

We expect--though we have no hard evidence ourselves--that it is reinforcing for students when they sense they can learn material that they think is difficult to learn. Our intention is to build a confidence in them that if they go about learning as a problem solving task--applying appropriate techniques--it is an active and perhaps even satisfying endeavor.

Test-Taking

The most often used mechanism for determining first year student learning in U.S. colleges is the multiple-choice (m-c) test. Typically, three such tests are given for each course during a term. They consist of somewhere between 30 to 50 items. Many students report having trouble with this format, stating that they can eliminate two of the four choices but have difficulty deciding on the remaining two and, hence, often guess. An alternative name for this type of test is, therefore, the multiple-guess test.

A problem that we believe exists for students studying for and taking the m-c test is that the studying pattern does not match the testing pattern. The students use a free-recall method for studying but rely on recognition while taking the test. Ideally, the method of studying and testing should match. We instruct the students to cover up the alternatives from which they are to select one, and to generate as much as they can that is related to the lead-in statement or question, or, in other words, to take the test along a free-recall pattern. They then should uncover the choices and select the one that best matches what they have already retrieved from memory. Taking the test in this matter is such a contrast to the students previous patterns that we find they have difficulty in doing so.

M-c tests often have cues within the stems or choices that lead to correct choice selection, but one has to know what those cues are. We teach them to our students.

A point to bring up at this time is that the designers of the College Success course are ambivalent about teaching students how to take m-c tests, for the appropriateness of this format has been greatly called into question by educators. The major argument is that few professors know how to make up items that go beyond simple thinking, leaving out testing that requires what are assumed to be higher levels cognitive processes. Also, the format is not similar to any that the student will encounter outside of testing conditions. Our resolution to our ambivalence was to opt for what the student will be asked to do in many college courses until such time as m-c tests are infrequently used.

Regarding essay exams, we assumed that many students did not know what was required by the questions they were asked. We concluded this after hearing enough faculty report that their students could not handle an essay adequately. We teach the students the different types of essay-test questions and how to organize their responses to fulfill the restrictions of the different types. The approach we recommend for essay questions is the one we recommend as an essential part for writing an essay, research paper, and for problem-solving brainstorming.

Brainstorming

We have asked a good sample of our students about their ability to outline an essay or term paper. Many of them report having had difficulty in making an outline for their written work in high school. Some report that when an outline was required that they would write the paper first and then outline what they had written. We found that students often believe that they are to generate an outline from their mind in an orderly Roman numeral I, capital letter A, subscript Arabic number 1 fashion. While this might be the end product of thinking for an outline, it is not the way to start.

We have our students do the following. First they are to write down everything that relates to the topic they are addressing, even that which they quickly determine is silly or otherwise inappropriate. They are to do no editing during this process. When they believe they have exhausted their store of information, they are to put a number "1" next to the first item they wrote. They are then to look at the second item and make a decision whether that would be in the same concept area as the first. If so, it too gets a number "1." If not, it is given a "2." If it looks, at the moment, that it could be either similar to or distinct from the first, it can be given both a "1" and a "2." The remaining items are treated similarly.

We are intrigued that the outcome of this exercise seldom yields more than seven categories, usually less. Also, we are impressed with how well and quickly the students can perform the operations, even if done as a whole-class exercise. The students do not name the categories until after they have completed the numbering. The process of naming them appears to help in refinement of organization. Students then regroup some items, reject some, and add new ideas that occur because of the process. they now have pieces that form paragraphs with internally consistent themes. We are indebted to Kathryn Stone of Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia for the framework of this approach.

If the students' task is to present similarities and differences between two positions, they are instructed to list everything they can for the one position and everything they can for the other. They then are to draw lines between the items that are similar in the two lists. What is left will form the basis, with appropriate deletions, of contrasts.

Recording Keeping

Because of the high possibility of error in subjectively judging one's level of evaluated progress (e.g., grades) in courses, students in College Success are encouraged to keep a

detailed record of assignments--such as tests and papers--and the letter grades they receive for them. They are also instructed how to compute the average of the grades for their courses. In most U.S. colleges and universities, students will be academically dismissed if their cumulative grades for a term fall below a certain level. Students are often placed on what is known as academic probation if their grades are sufficient to remain in college but not at a certain level. Hence, there are real consequences if grades are weak. It is to the students' advantage, then, to be aware of grade standing during the progress of a term. If there are problems, they can be attended to.

Keeping records of one's own grades for tests and papers is something in which United States' first year students have no practice. Their experience prior to college has been that their teachers kept records of their evaluated performance. Some teachers in secondary schools might inform students of current standing, but students seldom have had practice in keeping their own records. In college, the tendency is for students to be given general feedback about half-way in the term. As with the cards discussed in this report in the section on memory, the student can have a chart of progress by keeping a record of evaluated performance. As yet, we have no evidence of the value of this process, although students do report they found it is valuable to know how to calculate the average of their course grades.

We were also capitalizing on a phenomenon in psychology known as the reactive effect. It is that by keeping track of behaviors, frequency for example, there is an effect on the behaviors being recorded. Anyone who has tried to lose weight or improve a sports score has probably experienced this.

Problem Solving and Decision Making

Most of our students come to us with no or weak skills in problem solving and decision making. In our mind, this does not set them aside from most individuals. We believe that ability in these two closely related areas are important for success in college and beyond. As with anything else we do in our first-year-student course, we do not expect that the exposure students receive for problem solving and decision making is all they will need to develop abilities in this area, but it lays a foundation.

For problem analysis we use material from Roberts et. al. in their book, Introduction to Computer Simulation. For decision making we use the multi-attribute utility model explained in a book on managerial decision making.

Academic Social Behaviors

A complaint we heard frequently from faculty was that students were passive in their academic social behaviors, as indicated by their not orally participating in classes and not coming to professors' offices to discuss issues of concern or to deal with problems. The interpretation of this lack of interaction was most often an inference of some flaw within the student--the disease model.

Our interpretation was that the behaviors were not in the students' repertoire or, if they were, they did not transfer to the new academic environment. The goal was to increase the number of in-class instances of oral participation and to increase faculty contacts in their offices.

Working from Goldstein's Structured Learning Therapy program, we have students practice oral participation in College Success under conditions that most closely approximate those they will find in their traditional courses. They are given mini-scripts of what to say to interrupt a professor's lecture and how to set up appointments and to conduct oneself in a professor's office. They then are asked to practice participation in class and have to make an appointment with a professor in some other course to discuss something related to class work or some academic issue.

When we first instituted the above experiences, we received spontaneous feedback from professors, indicating that the process was noticeable. We had reports that students were participating more than usual and that they were coming to offices. When students are to practice these behaviors, they are asked in the College Success course to report how successful they thought their attempts were. This gives the course instructor and other students the opportunity to reinforce or to make suggestions for future exhibitions of the behaviors.

ADVISEMENT

In U.S. colleges and universities, students typically have an advisor (usually a faculty member) to help them in the selection of their courses for the next term. That role is carried out with various degrees of diligence and direction. In some cases--too many we believe--it consists of little more than agreeing, through a signature, with what a student has already figured out on his or her own. At the other extreme is the advisor who mandates that the student must take such-and-such a group of courses. In neither of these cases is the student given help in assessing strengths, interests, and needs that will form the basis of making sensible if not wise choices for the coming term.

In College Success, students are given information and exercises geared to help them become more judicious in their planning than had been the usual case prior to the implementation of the course. They respond to a five-page package of questions that is designed to help them assess their values, their goals, and their current academic situation. While this self-assessment is not extensive, it does provide a mechanism for relevant discussion with the advisor.

ORIENTATION

Part of being successful in a college is knowing its policies and procedures. We found that too often students were unaware of critical information for which they would later be held accountable or that could have helped them to be more effective. Such information is contained in a college's bulletin or catalog. Few students find these documents having a natural appeal to entice reading them. They seem to be just one step beyond the phone directory in interest value. We ask that they find specific information in our catalog and to write it down. Surprisingly, to us, students responded positively to this exercise, commenting that they saw the worth in knowing policies they had been unaware of previously.

Another part of being successful in a college is knowing what it has to offer beyond the course curriculum. Astin has reported that students who use their institution's resources tend to be the more successful students in terms of grades and retention. Our students are given tours of and presentations in, our art gallery and our theatre. They are also encouraged to become involved in at least one extra-curricular activity.

Conduct of the Course

Enrollment

College Success is open only to first year students. Each accepted student to SUNY College at Cortland receives a letter from one of the coordinators of the course (who also serves as Coordinator of the Freshman Year Experience), in which the course is described. During Summer Academic Orientation for freshmen, the course is again described by advisors. Almost all students who elect to enroll in it are accommodated. In 1984 and 1985, the number of students wishing the course was greater than we anticipated; and, as a result, large sections of the course had to be instituted. Doing so contradicted a fundamental feature of College Success--the low student-to-instructor ratio of 20 to 1--but allowed for comparisons between the small and large formats of the course.

No student is told to take the course, although many are encouraged to enroll because of their weak high school records or

low Verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test (VSAT) scores. Students who do enroll have statistically significantly lower VSAT's than students who do not. Even so, students with high VSAT's and strong high school averages also choose to enter the course. The composition of each section of the course is random, with no attention given to homogeneity based on entering characteristics.

Instructors

Instructors represent the faculty, administration, and professional staff. The following personnel have taught or will be teaching the course: the chairs of the English, History, and Philosophy departments, the deans of both our academic divisions, the assistant to the President of the College, the Director and the Assistant Director of Personnel, faculty from ten different departments, the Vice President for Student Affairs, and staff members of that division. The Director of Academic Advisement and the Coordinator of the Freshman Year have taught several sections, including the large ones, each term.

All who teach College Success do so above load with no explicit compensation. The Vice President for Academic Affairs does take teaching the course into consideration when determining merit pay adjustments, however. No one who has wished to teach College Success has been denied.

Training of Instructors

There is no direct training for those who teach College Success. Each instructor does receive a detailed lesson plan for each day. The plans are explicit enough so that one could walk in a class unprepared, open the manual of plans to the appropriate day, and begin to conduct a class authoritatively. About four meetings for instructors are held during the course of the term.

Textbook

Because of the need to tie the Instructor's Manual to a text, we found it was best for us to develop our own book for students. Written in a conversational tone, it follows a workbook format, with exercises intermixed with text. We have used two published texts in the past. While they were well written, we had difficulty adapting them to our needs.

Grading

Students receive either an "S" (for Satisfactory) or a "U" (Unsatisfactory) in the course. To earn an "S," students have to meet strict attendance requirements and have to do all the assignments. In 1984, fifteen percent of the students received an unsatisfactory grade.

Credit

One unit of elective credit toward graduation is earned by those who pass College Success.

Number of Meetings

There are 21 fifty-minute meetings of the course during the term. It meets twice a week for the first half of our 15-week term and once a week for the second half.

Section Size

The small sections are limited to approximately 20 students each. The large sections have had as many as 200 students.

Part III: Development of College Success

In the third and final section of this paper, we describe how we developed our course for our first-year students. Our purpose in doing so is to provide those who seek to develop a similar course with information that might be useful to them as they proceed.

The Thinking

Initially by accidental circumstance and then by design, the two developers of College Success met and talked on a frequent basis prior to considering the course. Our conversations focused on issues related to student academic behaviors. We both had extensive experience working closely with students. One individual was then in the Division of Student Affairs and was serving as Director of Academic Advisement and Orientation. The other was a full-time faculty member in the Department of Psychology. We each represented divergent views of student development, one representing the humanistic orientation, the other the behavioral view.

The seed for the course came from the Director of Academic Advisement, who was aware of courses for first year students at different institutions of higher education in the U.S. The psychologist part of the team was able to provide insight from his specialization of educational psychology. Together, we formulated the course that was to become College Success.

Background Work

In retrospect, we consider ourselves fortunate that we followed the basics of innovation theory outlined by Everett Rogers in his book Diffusion of Innovations. We consider

ourselves fortunate because we were unaware of the book's existence or the elements that Rogers considers. For those who would rather trust research than luck, we cannot recommend the book highly enough. We knew we were at risk in proposing the course, but how much, following Rogers' themes, we had no idea. In the following discourse, we will be reflecting several of Rogers' concepts.

In order for there to be adoption of an innovation, a need has to be recognized, but it is not enough that it be recognized just by the developers of the idea. Those to whom one wants to "sell" it also have to see a need. To determine need, before any formal application for course approval was made, we followed the suggestion made by Peters and Waterman in their book, In Search of Excellence. It was to walk around the plant, or, in our case, the campus. In doing so, we met many faculty on a casual basis and chatted with them about their perceptions of student performance in their courses.

The messages were almost always the same. They were that students were unmotivated to learn and were weak in skills for academic achievement. There was also high agreement, between those with whom we spoke, about the solution to these problems. It was to seek and to admit better students. We ended most of these interactions with faculty with the idea that perhaps there could be a course that would help students to more adequately meet the challenges of college. "Sounds good," and "Good luck," in some form or another, were the usual responses to this casually presented proposal.

While we did not realize it at the time, we were not random in selecting those with whom we spoke in halls of the campus buildings and over coffee. Looking back, we had primarily spoken with campus leaders, those who had influence in shaping others' perceptions and in supporting or blocking innovation. They represented various interest groups. Additionally, many of these individuals offered perceptive observations and suggestions that were helpful to us as we firmed up the course in terms of content and how it would be taught. We are indebted to many faculty for their insights that proved to be well founded. Because of various circumstances not under our control, this background work took two years. Hindsight tells us the time was well spent, for in it we were able to make helpful refinements. Rogers' makes the point that innovations take time.

When we finally put the course through the sequence of channels necessary for credit-bearing approval, we removed ourselves from the front line. We felt that if we needed to appear before any of the three major committees to further explain our proposal, that would be an indication of not having done adequate background work and would not be a good sign of campus acceptance. This does not mean that we were not anxious.

Finally, approval came from all channels. Almost immediately, we conducted two trial sections of the course. Rogers' suggests that it is unwise to run a full-scale innovation without first trying it out. At the end of the two trial sections, we solicited student feedback about what was right and wrong with the course. This provided additional information we were able to incorporate in our first major offering (eight sections) of College Success in the fall of 1983. In the fall of that year, we did a more formal needs assessment of faculty than that done through our walking around approach. We asked faculty to respond to a questionnaire on student academic skills. There were no surprises.

For the 1983 offering of the course, we were again fortunate. Those who offered to teach it were among the most respected individuals on our campus. In our minds, their support was a key factor in the initial favorable acceptance of College Success. The president of the faculty union, the chair of the History Department, the Associate Dean for Arts and Sciences, and the Dean of Professional Studies were among the early innovators.

Before going further, we want to emphasize that, as far as we can tell, College Success was perceived as having academic integrity. We think this is essential. We were proposing a course based on research from education and psychology and were not proposing a remedial course in the usual sense. We were saying, "Let us use the outcomes of scholarship to help our students."

We believe that another important ingredient to the success of our course has been our constantly (perhaps too much so) keeping all campus personnel informed of the results of the course as we have assessed them. We disseminate our findings throughout the campus, present them to all chairs of departments, and keep administrators up to date on what we are finding and doing.

Another ingredient for what we consider to be our success is the support we have received from the College's administration. Without that backing, we very much doubt that the course would have gone far. With administrators less willing to back what in fact was a risky proposition, we doubt we would be in business today.

The business we are in, though, is the business we want to be out of. We believe that the elements of College Success are best dealt with within the traditional courses that are heavily subscribed by first year students. All that we read suggests to us that the effects of the components of learning how to learn, how to take notes, how to study, and close faculty-student interactions are best realized in the context where they count--

the academic courses in which students enroll. Our goal is to be out of College Success as a separate entity and to have its goals met in the courses students take to meet their academic degree requirements. Finally, we look forward to the day when our students come prepared to benefit from college because the work we are involved in was done in high school.

Part IV: Results

Mainly we have used three sources for evaluating the course: first semester grades, student feedback (course evaluation), and instructor feedback. In all three areas, we judge the course to be successful.

Grade Point Average and Academic Dismissal

Regarding first-semester grade point average, each year we yoke students in the course with freshmen who did not enroll. We yoke the students on high school average, Verbal SAT score, and selected major. Obviously, we cannot find a match for every student in College Success, but we usually find a satisfactory number to make a statistical comparison. When we find a close but not exact match on high school average or Verbal SAT, we usually bias the match in favor of the comparison group. Our statistic is a correlated t-Test.

Generally we find a significant difference in first-semester grade point average (GPA) in favor of the College Success group. At times the difference is only detected when we organize the students according to the entry characteristics on which we made the match. We tend to group students with high, moderate, and low entry characteristics and do our comparisons within those groups.

For some years we have found that the "strongest" students benefit from the course more than any other group. Next to benefit appear to be the "weak" students. Least benefiting, if at all, are the students with average (for our College) entry scores.

We have also looked at the GPA outcomes by separating the students into two groups: those who took the course with first-time instructors and those who took it from veteran instructors. The one year for which we made this comparison, we found that students with new instructors performed better. We do not have an interpretation of this phenomenon.

Additionally, we have looked at the students' grades between those who were in the small classes (with the typical format) or the large lecture section (needed because of more student demand than available instructors). We have found no differences

between the two groups. This surprises us, because a major component of the course is the student-instructor relationship, and the literature suggests that this is a key variable in college student success.

Related to GPA would be academic dismissal. As the reader might anticipate, we have dramatic differences on this dimension, with from one-half to two-thirds fewer academic dismissals for the College Success students than for those who did not enroll in the course.

We are most aware that we do not have true experimental conditions and that self-selection into the course is a potentially contaminating variable.

Student Feedback

Each year since the inception of the course (1983), we have asked students for their opinions regarding its value to them and whether or not we should continue to offer the course. Students overwhelmingly respond positively to the course, and heartily endorse its continuance. Students who do not respond favorably usually have had similar material in high school and found what we offered as redundant.

Instructor Feedback

Each time the course is offered, instructors are asked to fill out a reaction form, indicating their views of the course and to offer comments on what they think is right with it and what needs to be worked on. Since 1983, instructors have consistently said that the course serves a valuable purpose and should be continued.

From the student and instructor feedback, modifications in the course are made each semester, but fewer and fewer changes have to be made as it gets more established. We have, we think, worked out most of the "bugs."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From what we can tell through meetings with individuals from various institutions of higher learning that have freshman-type courses, there is a perceived need for them. Some institutions focus mainly on the at-risk student; some emphasize the social-emotional domain; and most cover basic academic skills needed to be successful in college. It appears that no two schools structure or present their freshman courses the same way, although there are varying degrees of similarity. That which creates most similarity between these courses at different institutions is the use of a published textbook, particularly when it has an instructor's guide.

We have found a dearth of theoretical underpinning for freshman courses, except for developmental theory such as William Perry's. When this is the case, the focus for the course is usually in Student Affairs.

Colleges experience varying degrees of difficulty in developing their freshman courses. Some are mandated by administration, and it is our view that this is the riskiest way to proceed. We believe the course is best generated by the faculty, the primary body with a clear interest in the objectives. We also firmly believe one should start slowly, most desirably with a pilot program so that "bugs" can be worked out before a large enterprise is put in place. We know of two instances, first hand, where a large-scale effort was made, flopped, and it was much more difficult to try to rise from the ashes than it was to start off originally.

While some leaders in the field argue adamantly in favor of faculty training for those who teach these courses, we do not agree. It appears to us that with a tight course structure provided the instructors, no training is needed. Also, some colleges require the courses; we believe it should be voluntary. Having resistant students enrolled against their will can undermine the spirit of the class.

We project that freshman seminar courses, including ours, will change their focus as incoming students are better prepared. High schools are increasingly incorporating college-prep study skills into their curriculum. A new wrinkle, though, and one of considerable importance is service to the returning adult student who needs both academic skill development and social support system.